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ABSTRACT

In December 1963, President James A. Perkins established the Committee on Special Educational Projects (COSEP), which was to recommend and initiate programs through which Cornell University could make a larger contribution to the education of qualified students who have been disadvantaged by their economic, cultural, and educational environments. This paper focuses on the COSEP program and discusses: (1) Cornell University in the 1960's, including its physical setting, its socioeconomic makeup, and the academic qualifications of an entering freshmen class; (2) the establishment of COSEP; (3) the COSEP program in action, 1963-1970, in terms of recruitment, admission, financial aid and counseling; (4) the academic performance of COSEP students; and (5) gradual changes in COSEP program philosophy, from a program that commenced initially as a talent search aimed toward the recruitment of academically qualified students who for a variety of reasons could not attend selective institutions, to a search for students who were capable of successfully completing a course of studies. The paper concludes with 3 recommendations to other universities embarked on programs for minority group students. (AF)

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PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIONS ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MINORITY GROUP STUDENTS AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY

William L. Tetlow, Jr.

PREFACE

In a very recent research report published by the American Association for Higher Education, Robert T. Blackburn, a professor of higher education, speculates on the future practices of post-secondary institutions. In this report he states:

> "Predominantly black institutions will continue to exist. Exclusively white institutions will not. Admitting those whose chances of success are less according to the way the game is *currently played* simply means that the game as well as the players will be different. It is not a question of higher or lower standards; it is a question of *different* standards". (Emphasis added)

I hope, in the next 40 minutes, to give you an idea of the experience of one selective and prestigious institution in its experience with deliberately altered admissions practices. This university, throughout its distinguished history, has been noted for its innovative practices. The very motto of Cornell University - "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study" - was once regarded as wildly revolutionary. Cornell has been damned by the clergy for its nonsectarian posture and was denounced with horror in 1877 by the President of Yale for its introduction of coeducation. More recently, it has encountered resistance to its altered admissions policies for minority group students.

Paper presented at the 137th annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, December 27, 1970, Conrad Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Illinois. Some of the data in the paper appeared previously in the *Cornell Chronicle*, Volume 1, Number 4, October 16, 1969.

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The topic of today's session is "University Open Admissions". Many of you undoubtedly believe that Cornell is not "open" as you understand the term, and, therefore, a discussion about its admissions policies does not belong on the same panel with one concerned with the policies of the City University of New York. To those of you who hold this viewpoint I wish to advance the notion that the word "open" refers to a whole continuum of circumstances and is not just the dichotomous opposite of "closed". Cornell's admission policies are more open in 1970 than they were in 1960 because it made deliberate adjustments in its admissions procedures in the interim. It actively began in 1963 to take steps to recruit, admit, financially aid, and counsel kinds of students who had not been at Cornell previously in any significant numbers. The effect of these efforts was to alter drastically the opportunity odds *without lowering the academic standards* for receipt of a degree.

A description of the Cornell experience will perhaps encourage other highly selective institutions to alter their practices and make their admissions process more "open".

In describing this experience to you, I feel it necessary to describe in part the operative campus ambience during the time of the key decisions. In doing so I realize that many of the beliefs, values, and descriptive terms which were acceptable in the mid 1960's are considered obsolete - and to some persons even repugnant - today. Nevertheless, they must be used for a full understanding of the history of Cornell's special program. So that you may be able to know the direction and relation of my remarks, here is an outline:

Outline

- Cornell University in the 1960's
- The Establishment of the Committee on Special Educational Projects
- The COSEP Program in Action 1963 - 1970
- The Academic Performance of the COSEP Students
- Gradual Changes in the COSEP Program Philosophy
- Recommendations to other Universities

CORNELL UNIVERSITY IN THE 1960's

So that you may understand the setting for this case study, I shall briefly describe Cornell University in physical, socioeconomic and academic terms.

Physical Setting

Cornell is a medium-sized (15,000 students) institution occupying 400 buildings and located on 1,500 acres of hillside in the heart of the very rural and attractive Finger Lakes region 250 miles northwest of New York City. The remote setting of this Ivy League institution is well described by a comment, probably apochryphal, attributed to its founder, Ezra Cornell. When explaining to a friend that the motto of his new university was to be "I would found an institution were any person can find instruction in any study", he was told: "With such a policy you will be inundated with students". He replied, "Wait until you see where I locate it!"

Socio-Economic Description

The university is the largest employer within a radius of 50 miles and together with Ithaca College (a small privately endowed liberal arts college), the students, faculty and staff account for a substantial portion of the total county population; approximately 4% of the county population is Negro. The student body is drawn from all 50 states, Canada, and over 200 foreign countries. Three quarters of the students are from the Middle Atlantic States; this is partially due to the fact that Cornell is the Land Grant College for New York State and approximately 85% of the students enrolled in the four statutory colleges are state residents. From 1960 to 1964 it was estimated that there were only 4 American Negroes per entering freshman class.

Over half of Cornell students' parents are employed in professional and managerial positions and over 30% of both the fathers and mothers have graduate degrees; the male-female ratio is 3.4 to 1 and the university's social life, in the middle of the past decade, primarily revolved around

approximately 70 national and local fraternities and sororities. The total annual expense for a year at Cornell was $3,000 in 1964 and is approximately $4,300 today. Almost two-thirds of the student body receives some sort of financial assistance administered by the university. In 1964 the annual mean aid per enrolled undergraduate was almost $700; in 1970 the figure is approximately $1,000.

Academic Qualifications of Entering Class

The university annually receives in excess of 12,000 applications for admission to its freshman class of 2,300. In the most competitive division only one of five applications is approved. Time magazine recently referred to the "crunch of meritocracy", meaning high admissions qualifications caused by a great increase in applications. The resultant high degree of selectivity is a *crucial* element in the remainder of my remarks and needs to be underscored. Several years ago in an article in the College Board Review, S.A. Kendrick noted that as institutions become selective (and he added that it may be thrust upon them) they tend to find verbal ability the most useful available selection device after the secondary school record. The result is that the aptitude test scores and secondary school class rank of the *entering* class are inexorably drawn higher and higher to the point where 90% of the students now entering Arts and Sciences at Cornell have aptitude test scores in the upper 15% of the entire scale ranges.

In summation, then, Cornell University in the mid 1960's was a relatively isolated, highly selective, non-urban university, with substantial numbers of white students of considerable academic ability who were drawn principally from families of high socio-economic status.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS

In December 1963 President James A. Perkins established a presidential committee to "recommend and initiate programs through which Cornell could make a larger *contribution* to the education of *qualified* students who have been *disadvantaged* by their cultural, economic and educational environments". (Emphasis added)

I call your attention to three key words in that charge to the committee:

(a) *contribution* - the intent was to begin to contribute the resources of a noted university toward what was perceived as a social problem, national in scope. It was hoped that the results of the program would furnish other educators with valuable information regarding extensive programs aimed at minority group students.

(b) *qualified* - the beginning was to be modest and attention was to be initially focused on disadvantaged but academically qualified students who, for a variety of reasons, were not well represented at highly selective universities. One of these reasons was a perceived lack of university receptivity to disadvantaged students; another was the belief of many of these students, and of their teachers, parents and associates, that the students were not qualified for admission and incapable of doing the work at a university like Cornell:

(c) *disadvantaged* - the reference was to students whose cultural, economic and educational environments had placed them in a subordinate position in U.S. society. This, primarily but not exclusively, placed attention upon members of racial or ethnic groups which were in a population minority in the U.S.

The COSEP committee initially decided to focus its efforts on encouraging disadvantaged students to attend a university; the bulk of the efforts was to be in terms of recruitment and scholarship assistance.

Five or ten disadvantaged but highly able students were initially to be enrolled, with a later planned increase to twenty-five to fifty enrolled students per year. Why was the number of students to be admitted so small? One reason was that the proposed program was expensive. It was the unanimous opinion of the COSEP committee that no student should be offered admittance without also receiving the necessary complete financial assistance; this meant an average of $2,600 per student in 1964. The second reason was that the belief in the capability of these students to thrive, even survive, in an environment such as Cornell's was primarily a matter of faith. Such a

program clearly was viewed as experimental by the vast majority of both academic and lay persons.

Why only start with high ability students? Because the initial premise was that there already existed a substantial number of academically qualified students who had been disadvantaged by environmental conditions and thus prevented from attending leading universities. The initial thrust of the program was to see if such students could adequately cope with the environment of a highly selective and predominantly white university. Addition of the element of insufficient qualifications by the usual competitive standards was considered a further and more risky experiment to be given greater attention at a later date.

THE COSEP PROGRAM IN ACTION 1963 - 1970

With a charge essentially urging experimentation and innovation, and a setting and campus ambience alien to many minority group students, the committee began its work.

Recruitment

Its initial and primary (but by no means exclusive) concern was with American Negro students. An admissions recruiter was hired and his spring 1964 visits to high schools, coupled with referrals from agencies such as the National Scholarship Service Fund for Negro Students (NSSFNS), Cooperative Program for Educational Opportunity (CPEO) and the National Achievement Scholarship Program (NASP) led to the matriculation of 20 black students in the fall of 1964; 10 of these students were on full COSEP scholarships. The initial thrust was an *identification and selection* process with an emphasis on close relationships with a number of ghetto secondary schools. *Highly motivated* students were sought. It quickly became clear, however, that the academically gifted and well prepared Negro lacked no opportunity to attend a prestigious institution. Emphasis was then shifted to identifying promising candidates as early as grade 10 with the aim of exposing them to college thinking and college personal contacts.

The desired effect was the raising of aspirations of students who would not normally be thinking of college. Prior to admission these students would attend the six week summer enrichment program in math and English which was sponsored by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (i.e. "Upward Bound Program").

Admission

Exercising some flexibility in admissions requirements has been a long standing policy of admissions committees. The COSEP program was generally confined, however, to those whose credentials indicated that they could reasonably be expected to handle normal academic loads. Under the *existing competitive* standards, however, very few minority students were in strong competitive positions for acceptance. The committee thus shifted its attention and emphasis to students whose academic records could be considered marginal by the *usual Cornell competitive* standards. The word "qualified" as mentioned in the committee's charge became the focus of attention and interpretation. Emphasis was shifted from "qualified" under existing *competitive* standards to "qualified" under *capability* standards. At highly selective institutions these are quite different levels on the usual indices. Factors other than the SAT scores began to take on a heavier weight than usual, e.g., teacher and counsellor recommendations, personal interviews, class standing, indications of strong motivation, etc. The quite successful experiences with the initial group of students, which the committee felt was due largely to close guidance and counselling, prompted more formalized relaxation of the competitive, but not the capability, standards. Somewhat surprisingly, those few students who had left for academic reasons were those who had scored at the higher SAT level- and on the whole the lower scoring "risk" students exceeded all expectations. The committee became more firmly convinced of the soundness of its selection philosophy. During the years 1965 - 1969 the SAT verbal scores of the COSEP students ranged from 380 to 740 with a mean of 550 and a standard deviation of 90 points. The SAT mathematics scores ranged from 370 to 790 with a mean of 580 and a standard deviation of 100 points.

Financial Aid

I inferred earlier that this program represented an expensive proposition. All Cornell students are awarded aid on the basis of proven financial need and the long-standing objective of the financial aid office has been to meet the financial need of every admitted student. The admissions and financial aid processes have been historically kept separate and distinct organizationally, physically and operationally, at Cornell, to prevent the financial need factor from entering into admissions considerations. The COSEP committee established the firm policy that no COSEP student was to be admitted without a corresponding aid offer based upon demonstrated dollar need. In 1964 financial aid averaged $2,600 per COSEP student per year and the figure has been steadily rising since. The total outlay of university dollars is the cumulation of aid for all classes so that the necessary funds, in each fiscal year, to support only 60 COSEP students per class amount in 1970 to approximately $400,000. Since Cornell began to accelerate its commitment to this program in terms of number of students supported and since costs have also increased sharply, the university presently has a financial aid award of over one million dollars annually committed for the approximately 400 students being assisted by the program.

The COSEP program funds were initially provided by a generous alumnus, Harold L. Bache, '16. In the ensuing years the program was supported largely by university general funds with a modest amount from other sources such as individuals, corporations and small foundations. In 1967, the Rockefeller Foundation provided a matching challenge grant to provide the funds for 35 students through their graduation. Grants such as these and those from several New York State programs have been vital to the continued success of the program.

Counselling

Immediate support, advice and additional academic guidance counselling is available from the Dean of Students' staff which includes black persons. An extra advisor from the COSEP committee and an opportunity to take one course lighter than usual is also offered to all COSEP students.

This counselling has been fundamental to the program. In its 1966 report the COSEP committee felt compelled to note that the students "arrive to find an unfamiliar, demanding, and in some ways, hostile environment".

The impact of an unfamiliar environment presented some special problems for black students. In contrast to the bulk of students at Cornell the parental occupations of COSEP students are generally non-skilled and low-paying. Cleveland Donald, one of the black graduates of Cornell, recently wrote that "Indirectly, the liberal paternalism of the Cornell white community inadvertently retards the process of escape [from the black community] and forces a common identity upon black students" Their blackness is constantly thrust upon them often by questions from well meaning and interested white students.

There is, however, a strong desire on the part of the COSEP students to succeed academically and most feel a special responsibility, not only unto themselves, but toward their ethnic groups, families and home communities. The COSEP committee has expressed the hope and expectation that as the black student population grows the Cornell community will understand the student and his culture more fully.

THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE COSEP STUDENTS

It should be clear by now that the students falling under the purview of the COSEP committee during the last eight years vary widely in ability level and in previous experience. As part of a review of the entire COSEP program President Dale R. Corson requested the Cornell Office of Institutional Studies in the summer of 1969 to conduct a detailed examination of the academic performance of the students. A variety of indicators were examined in order to obtain as full an understanding as possible; no single one was expected to tell the complete story. Transcripts were studied, professors were interviewed, grade-point data and other performance data were gathered. There is not sufficient time to give a detailed explanation of all of the methodology and results but I shall attempt to present the highlights.

Several of the analyses used a schema which classified all of the students into one of four arbitrarily chosen groups. The three standard admissions predictors were used (i.e. SAT-V, SAT-M, secondary school class rank) and if a student's scores on all three measures equalled or exceeded the 25th percentile values of all entering Cornell students (i.e., he was in the upper 3/4 of the entering class) he was categorized in Group A; students with two-out-of-three of their scores lower than the 5th percentile (i.e. in the bottom 5%) were classified in Group D. This latter group (Group D) contained what were considered the "high risk" students according to the usual Cornell competitive standards. Group B students were slightly less qualified than Group A students, and Group C students were marginal (in the bottom quarter of the entering class). One analysis used a student's average based upon all of his courses for a single semester as the unit of measurement. The results, based upon over 700 semesters of performance, are summarized in table 1:

Table 1

Percentage Distribution of Semester Averages
By Admissions Group
Cornell University COSEP Students 1964-1969

Semester Average	Group A	B	C	D	Total
A- to A+	7%	2%	1%	2%	2%
B- to B+	45	29	28	18	28
C- to C+	36	44	54	65	53
F to D+	12	25	17	15	17
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

As you can note, the Group A students (those in the upper 3/4's of the entering class) performed in a consistently different and superior manner to all other students in the program, with over half of their semesters in the A and B range. Not also, however, the interesting anomaly that the Group D students have a smaller percentage of semesters of performance in the F to D-plus range than do the Group B students. *One* plausible but *untested* hypothesis which might explain this result is: that the Group B students

have academic credentials that were not marginal, that this condition could produce a fair degree of academic self-confidence, and that a subsequent overactive participation in non-academic activities distracted these students from their academic pursuits. In contrast, the academically marginal students (Group C and D) know that they have to work hard, tend to limit themselves to relatively few extra curricular activities, if any, and diligently apply themselves to their studies. These students simply cannot afford to get distracted with a multiplicity of activities or a plethora of goals.

It should be especially noted at this juncture that the Group D students with low SAT scores were selected on the basis of evidence from high school counsellors, teachers, and others,which indicated high motivation for achievement in college.

Another analysis that was conducted to yield further information was a comparison of the academic status of the COSEP students with that of an entire Cornell college class. The only good comparative data available concerned the class of 1964 in the College of Arts and Sciences. The results, which show striking similarities, are summarized in table 2.

Table 2

Academic Status of Students
Percent Distribution

	COSEP Classes of 1969-1972 (n = 243)	COSEP Class of 1969 (n = 37)	Arts & Sciences Class of 1964 (n = 465)
Graduated on or ahead of schedule	11	67	67
Not graduated but on schedule	60	-	-
Behind schedule	15	16	13*
Academically Dismissed	10	8	11
Voluntarily withdrawn	4	8	10

*This study was done in 1965; the final status of these students is unknown.

Analyses were also done to determine the usefulness of the standard academic predictors in predicting the subsequent grade-point-averages of the COSEP students. The general finding was that the correlations for COSEP students were considerably lower than for a typical class in the College of Arts and Sciences. In subsequent analyses the COSEP classes were divided into sub-groups according to sex and also according to the previously mentioned groups based upon SAT's and class rank; the results are presented in table 3:

Table 3

Correlation Summary

Standard Academic Predictors with Grade-Point-Average

Criterion: First Semester GPA	Arts & Sciences Class of 1969 (n = 513)	COSEP Classes of 1969 - 72 (n = 243)
Predictors:		
SAT-V only	.39	.18
SAT-M only	.35	.16
Rank (Tenths) only	.34	.11
Rank (standardized) only	.48	.10
Best weighted multiple	.51	

It may be interesting to you to know the post graduation plans of some of the students in the COSEP class of 1969. One third of the graduates are now continuing their studies in graduate or professional schools. Four students are in government or military service; three are in teaching or university employment, and four are employed by industrial firms.

All of these data, I believe, tend to justify the practice of the COSEP committee in putting less than the usual emphasis on SAT scores and continuing to place strong weight upon other evidence relating to a student's motivation for scholastic pursuits. Since some will undoubtedly feel that this is over interpretation of these data, I must emphasize that I am <u>not</u>

advocating a policy of ignoring the objective test data but rather favoring a practice which places those scores in appropriate perspective. Students with academic credentials considerably less than those dictated by competition for scarce openings are capable of performing creditably at universities like Cornell!

GRADUAL CHANGES IN COSEP PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

One of the more interesting experiences resulting from the COSEP program was to note the shifts in aims, objectives and procedures during the last seven years. The program commenced as essentially a talent search aimed toward the recruitment of academically qualified students who for a variety of reasons were disinclined or effectively prohibited from attending selective institutions. Thus the original ten students in the program for the most part could meet the normal competitive standards for admission and tended to come from families with backgrounds not greatly different from that of the majority of the student body. The initial objectives were to start with 10 or 20 students per class and work toward a goal of about 50 per class. Initially the focus was on negro students with the intent of admitting other types of disadvantaged students in later years. The starting funds were donated to the university and in the subsequent years the bulk of funds came from the university's annual operating budget. "Qualified students" meant those who could meet the existing competitive standards. "Disadvantaged" meant culturally, economically and/or educationally deprived. One admissions recruiter and one counselling member were added to the Cornell staff expressly for working with these students.

By 1970 the emphasis of the program had shifted to those students who were "qualified" in that they were capable of successfully completing a course of studies. This necessitated adjustments in the admissions policies. The last two entering COSEP classes have totaled approximately one hundred students per year. Almost one-quarter of the students are non-black (e.g., Spanish-American, American-Indian, Oriental, Caucasian). The total costs for financial aid assistance exclusively has risen from

$13,000 annually to over one million dollars annually. The staff associated with the program has risen from two part-time people to two full-time professionals, three part-time graduate assistants, and as many as five undergraduate student counsellors.

Perhaps the most significant change in the whole program relates to the aims of many of the black students themselves. One black graduate of the program asserts that the major assumption behind the original organization of the program was that *ultimately* the needs and aspirations of the black students were not unlike those of white students. In 1963 complete integration was the goal of the majority of negro students and the first groups of students entering Cornell with the assistance of the COSEP project for the most part held that belief. A year later the surge of black nationalism emerged and the subsequent entering classes of black students, on the whole, had different aims and objectives. One of the former COSEP students, Cleveland Donald, Jr., has written that:

> "In the integrationist period, blacks on a white campus constituted the highest act of commitment to the black community".

He then goes on to say:

> "Having less of a need to justify the *modus vivendi*, since they had not constructed it, and arriving newly from the black community this [second] generation stridently attack the whites and the black first generation for the racial situation on campus. In the process they legitimated themselves as the oracles of black power on the predominantly white college campus".

The later generations of black students began to press for the formation of a separate degree-granting division of the university devoted exclusively to black studies.

Words and phrases such as "disadvantaged", "culturally deprived", and even "negro" became repugnant terms to the students who now generally prefer the descriptive term "black" or "Afro-American". Furthermore, black students whose academic credentials were outstanding objected to being identified with a program that included students of more limited ability. In actuality, students are not *in* COSEP but rather the COSEP committee has

a concern with and for all minority group students and its major objective is to increase such representation on campus and to meet the corresponding responsibilities.

I believe it is also valid to assert that significant changes in the program, in addition to those caused by forces external to the university, were brought about when the number of minority group students reached a "critical mass". When their numbers became large enough for the minority group students to develop a strong group identity many changes took place that were not previously possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO OTHER UNIVERSITIES

The Cornell COSEP program is now in its seventh year of operation. It is broader in scope than had been originally anticipated in 1963 and has undergone several philosophical and operational changes: undoubtedly some persons may feel that there is still insufficient evidence upon which to base sound conclusions. Nevertheless, I feel that there are several recommendations that can be made to those who may be contemplating or have just recently embarked upon extensive programs for minority group students:

1. *Highly selective colleges and universities can admit students with scholastic aptitude scores much lower than the usual competitive standards and expect many of them to successfully complete a degree program.* It is imperative that faculty, alumni and parents recognize the distinction between a standard which is the result of increasing *competition*, due almost exclusively to the increasing numbers of applicants and a standard which has been established, often arbitrarily, for quality control purposes. There are many minority group students (and parenthetically many majority group students also) who are capable of successfully completing a course of studies for a degree but who cannot meet the excessively high competitive standards. When someone complains about "lowering standards", be certain that he understands which standard is being lowered.

2. *Any college or university which embarks upon such a program should clearly recognize that it will most likely be a very expensive proposition.* The vast majority of minority group students will need extensive financial assistance and a substantial percentage of the financial aid award may have to be in the form of non-recoverable scholarship funds or grants. It also should be an inviolate policy that an individual student's acceptance be based upon his academic and personal qualifications and not upon his ability to financially support himself. Increases in counselling staff needed for the assistance of these students will also add another cost to the overall program.

3. *Extensive counselling provisions are critical to the success of any program for minority students.* The students will need assistance in many areas in adjusting to an unfamiliar and continually demanding environment. The range of counselling can include academic, social, emotional and financial advice and assistance. All of the students will probably need encouragement and assistance at some time in coping with the increased visibility of their minority status.

In closing, I would advise you to be *prepared for the unexpected.* As I have already indicated, there are aspects of the Cornell program which were totally unforseen in 1963. Aims and objectives can and will change and adjustments in both attitudes and behavior will have to be modified. I believe, however, that the most important thing is that you provide the *opportunity* for minority group students to attend your institution. The next most important thing is that you provide adequate *assistance* to them once they have enrolled.